

The following is a translation from Estonian. In case of disputes, the Estonian text shall prevail.

Conditions and Procedure for Mobilitas 3.0 “Support for applying for an ERC grant” activity

1. SCOPE OF APPLICATION, RESPONSIBILITY

- 1.1. This directive establishes the conditions and procedure for applying for, determining, allocating, and reporting for the activity "Support for applying for an ERC grant" (hereinafter referred to as "*support*") under the program "Support for the Internationalization of Research and Development and Participation in the International Knowledge Market" or Mobilitas 3.0 (hereinafter referred to as the "*program*").
- 1.2. The Estonian Research Council (hereinafter referred to as the "*Council*") shall operate in accordance with this regulation and the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Research.
- 1.3. The preparation and supplementation of this regulation, as well as the allocation of the support specified therein, shall be coordinated by the research and development funding department of the Council.
- 1.4. In matters not regulated by this regulation, the Council has the right to make informed decisions, involving experts as necessary.

2. THE AIM AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. The aim of the support is to increase the number of European Research Council (hereinafter *ERC*) grant holders and to motivate successful applicants to reapply for an ERC grant from the European Research Council.
- 2.2. The support is provided to researchers who have previously submitted an ERC grant application but have received a negative funding decision from the ERC.
- 2.3. The support is awarded for the implementation of an independent research project and it is not intended for covering the own contribution of other research projects.
- 2.4. The supported project must contribute to at least one area of smart specialization defined in "Estonian Research and Development, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021-2035" (hereinafter referred to as the *RDIE strategy*). The Council will verify the project's contribution to smart specialization areas defined in the RDIE strategy; if there is no connection, the support will not be granted.

3. DEFINITIONS

Estonian Smart Specialization Areas - Focus areas of the RDIE strategy with business and economic potential, which are: digital solutions across all areas of life; health technologies and services; valorisation of local resources; smart and sustainable energy solutions.

Implementer - the Estonian Research Council serves as the implementer of the programme.

European Research Council (ERC) - The European Union's funding agency for science, which supports cutting-edge research and novel and innovative approaches in new scientific

fields. The ERC's mission is to support top-level research in Europe. To achieve this goal, the Research Council awards five types of grants, which are open to researchers in all fields of science, and the sole evaluation criterion is scientific excellence.

ERC grant - A grant issued by the ERC, which is open to researchers in all fields of science, and the sole evaluation criterion is scientific excellence. The ERC awards a total of five types of grants (Starting Grant (StG), Consolidator Grant (CoG), Advanced Grant (AdG), Synergy Grant (SyG), and Proof of Concept Grant for investigating innovation and market potential of research results). Through this support measure, support is provided for researchers applying for the first four types of grants.

" Support for applying for an ERC grant " support (support) - Regulated by this procedure and provided based on it, the support allows a researcher to resubmit their ERC grant application.

Applicant for the support or institution - A research and development institution registered in Estonia, a higher education institution, or a private or public sector institution operating in Estonia, where the principal investigator works during the use of the support.

Principal investigator (the PI)- The researcher applying for the ERC grant, who is an employee of the institution applying for the support, carrying out the research project and for whom the institution is requesting the support under this procedure.

Members of the research staff - Individual(s) whose work is intrinsically related to the project presented in the application and who constitute the PI's research team.

4. ELIGIBILITY PERIOD

- 4.1. The support can be used from January 1, 2023, until December 31, 2028.
- 4.2. Support is granted for a period of up to 1.5 years per project, but not beyond the start of the ERC project, in case the resubmission application receives a positive funding decision.

5. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE APPLICANT AND THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

- 5.1. Institution may apply for the support for the principal investigator, i.e., the researcher who has reached the second evaluation step in the ERC grant application round and has received an overall score of "A" (for Synergy Grant: has reached the third evaluation step) but has received a negative funding decision from the ERC.
- 5.2. The support is aimed at improving the research project with the goal of resubmitting the improved project in the next ERC call for applications.
- 5.3. The PI cannot be changed after submitting the application.
- 5.4. The PI commits to submitting a new ERC grant application within the following two years from the initial ERC call for applications if applying for the same type of grant, or within three years if applying for a different type of grant.
- 5.5. The institution can apply for the support for up to two times per one PI during the period mentioned in point 4.1.

5.6. The institution ensures the availability of the necessary work environment (including workspace, administrative and support structures, etc.) for the PI and other members of the research staff to carry out the project.

6. APPLYING FOR A SUPPORT

6.1. Applications can be submitted on an ongoing basis.

6.2. To apply for the support, the institution submits a letter of intent to the implementer via email, including information about the PI, which the implementer registers in the document management system.

6.3. The implementer opens the application form in the Estonian Research Information System (ETIS) no later than five working days after receiving the email mentioned in point 6.2.

6.4. The institution, in collaboration with the PI, prepares the application, which is submitted to the implementer through ETIS.

6.5. The application can be submitted in Estonian or in English.

6.6. The application must include:

6.6.1. the project title in Estonian and English;

6.6.2. name of the institution

6.6.3. field of research and development;

6.6.4. names of the PI and other members of the research staff, their positions at the time of application submission and upon approval;

6.6.5. the requested support period;

6.6.6. summary of the project in Estonian and in English;

6.6.7. main objectives, results, impact of the project, connection to the non-funded ERC grant application, and preparation for a new ERC grant application, including the type of ERC grant to be applied for;

6.6.8. expected results and work plan with schedule;

6.6.9. project budget;

6.6.10. an explanation about how the compliance with ethical issues will be secured during the implementation of the project and a comment on whether the project requires a permit from a specific ethics committee or the permit has already been obtained;

6.6.11. an explanation about which data will be generated during the implementation of the project and how the data will be managed;

6.6.12. if the project necessitates compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, an explanation about which genetic resources will be used and whether the project requires the due diligence declaration or the due diligence declaration has already been submitted;

6.6.13. project's contribution to smart specialization areas.

6.7. The application must include the evaluation report of the non-funded ERC grant application.

6.8. If the applicant or the PI has applied for funding for the same project or its components from multiple measures or other state budget, European Union, or external funds simultaneously, the applicant must provide relevant information.

- 6.9. If the requested support can be regarded as state aid (requested by an unevaluated research and development institution, private higher education institution, or company, and used for economic activities), the applicant must complete the state aid form during the application process. As additional information, the applicant must indicate whether the support is requested under the General Block Exemption Regulation or as de minimis aid. If the support is requested under the General Block Exemption Regulation, the amount of support depends on the conditions set out in Article 25 of the regulation, and the application must be submitted before starting the activities. The applicant must indicate whether the project involves basic or applied research.
- 6.10. The implementer has the right to request additional data and documents from the PI or from the applicant.

7. BUDGET AND ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

- 7.1. The support is paid based on a unit cost.
- 7.2. The unit cost of the support depends on the current starting grant (PSG) level III amount and its calculation methodology issued from state budget.¹
- 7.3. The unit cost is based on the "Guidelines for Budgeting Grant Application" annually approved by the Council's board.
- 7.4. The unit cost includes the staff costs of the PI and other members of the research staff hired by the institution (personnel costs), research costs, and overhead costs.
- 7.4.1. The staff costs consist of salary along with any and all state taxes, contributions, and compensations arising from law.
- 7.4.2. Research costs cover externally procured research and development services, costs related to the (open) publication and dissemination of research and development results obtained during the research project, costs related to the protection of intellectual property, and other necessary research-related expenses based on the specific nature of the research project.
- 7.4.3. Overhead costs constitute 25% of the sum of expenses from points 7.4.1 and 7.4.2.
- 7.5. The unit cost is not considered for periods shorter than one month.
- 7.6. The basis for paying the unit cost is a certificate submitted by the institution, indicating that the PI is employed full-time under an employment contract at the applicant's organization during the support period. The certificate includes the name of the PI and the period of employment at the institution.
- 7.7. The applicant ensures self-financing, which is 14% of the total unit cost.

8. PROCESSING THE APPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The processing of the applications is carried out by the implementer.
- 8.2. The processing environment for applications is ETIS. Application submission and communication with the applicant occur through ETIS. Decisions made during the

¹ In 2023, the Estonian Research Council has approved a PSG Level III rate of 110,000 euros per year, which equates to 9,166.7 euros per month.

According to point 2.5 of the "Guidelines for Budgeting Grant Applications" (23 January 2023) the allocation of budget PSG III was as follows: 88,000 euros for direct costs and 22,000 euros for overhead costs per year.

processing, including approval or rejection of the application, are conveyed through ETIS. The parties involved in the application are required to regularly monitor messages in ETIS and keep their contact information up to date.

- 8.3. The processing of the application consists of the following stages:
 - 8.3.1. registration of the application;
 - 8.3.2. checking the technical details of the application, during which it will be determined if the application, applicant, the PI, and other members of the research staff meet the requirements and the contribution of the project to the smart specialization areas;
 - 8.3.3. decision on approval or rejection of the application.
- 8.4. The scientific excellence of the application is not evaluated.
- 8.5. The implementer forms a committee to check the project's contribution to the smart specialization areas.
- 8.6. In case of formal inaccuracies which can be corrected without changing the content of the application are present, the implementer will set a deadline of up to ten working days for correction.
- 8.7. The implementer verifies adherence to research ethics principles and the presence of a data management plan in the applications.
- 8.8. In case the application, applicant, the PI, or other members of the research staff are deemed not to comply with the requirements, the implementer decides to reject the application.
- 8.9. Applications that meet the requirements are approved in the order of submission until the depletion of the funds.
- 8.10. In the approval decision of the support, the implementer may describe the conditions that the institution and/or the PI are required to fulfill upon receiving the support, including feedback related to research ethics and data management.
- 8.11. In case of false information, plagiarism, or fraud, the implementer has the right to terminate the processing of the application and not review the application.

9. GRANTING OF APPLICATION

- 9.1. The implementer decides to:
 - 9.1.1. approve the application and allocate the support;
 - 9.1.2. not approve the application.
- 9.2. The decision regarding the application is communicated to the applicant and the PI within ten working days from the decision, through the ETIS platform.
- 9.3. Before deciding to not approve the application, the implementer provides the applicant with the opportunity to submit a written opinion and objections regarding the decision within the deadline set by the implementer (hearing). At the hearing, attention will be paid to the assessment of the adherence to procedural rules and to the correction of possible factual errors.
- 9.4. The decision mentioned in point 9.1 is made by directive of the Management of the Council, specifying the period and budget for using the support in case the application is approved.

10. ALLOCATION OF THE SUPPORT

- 10.1. The implementer will enter into a tripartite support agreement (hereinafter “support agreement”) with the applicant and the PI, outlining the mutual rights, obligations, and responsibilities of the parties.
- 10.2. The support is disbursed to the applicant, who is required to enable the PI to use the allocated support for implementing project, in accordance with the application.
- 10.3. The payment of the support shall be subject to the terms and conditions specified in the tripartite support agreement.
- 10.4. In case the support is allocated, the institution shall enter into an employment contract with the PI for implementing the project if such a contractual relationship did not already exist at the time of awarding the support or if the existing employment contract needs to be amended.
- 10.5. The PI submits a data management plan to the implementer within the first six months of the project.

11. TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF THE PROJECT

- 11.1. The PI may request the temporary suspension of the project in the case of maternity, paternity, or parental leave, compulsory military service, serious illness, or other exceptional circumstances due to which the implementation of the project will become impossible or significantly more difficult.
- 11.2. The request for the temporary suspension of project has to be requested jointly by the institution and the PI, based on a reasoned application submitted to the implementer.
- 11.3. The end date of the project will be extended by the duration of the suspension, but not beyond the deadline specified in point 4.1.
- 11.4. The support agreement will be suspended for the temporary suspension period of the project.

12. TERMINATION OF THE PROJECT

- 12.1. The support ends either on the final deadline of the support period or prematurely upon the commencement of the ERC project if the repeat application receives a positive funding decision.
- 12.2. All activities funded by the support must be concluded by the project's end date.

13. PREMATURE TERMINATION OF THE SUPPORT

- 13.1. The implementer has the right to declare the decision to approve or continue the application as void and terminate the support agreement if:
 - 13.1.1. there is a basis as stipulated in § 14 of the general conditions for the granting and use of funds of the 2021-2027 European Union Cohesion and Internal Security Policy Funds¹ implementation plans;²
 - 13.1.2. the applicant or the PI has submitted a respective request;

² <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/121092022003>

- 13.1.3. the applicant or the PI has fundamentally violated the requirements stipulated in these guidelines or the support agreement;
 - 13.1.4. the PI is unable use the support (due to death, severe illness, relocation to another job, or other significant and justified circumstances);
 - 13.1.5. the applicant or the PI has intentionally provided false information or there has been plagiarism or fraud in activities related to the project;
 - 13.1.6. other significant and justified circumstances exist.
- 13.2. Before the revocation of the decision to support the application or before the termination of the support agreement, the implementer shall give the institution and the PI an opportunity to submit their position.
- 13.3. After the termination of the support agreement, the institution is required to refund the unused portion of the support to the implementer. The PI, together with the institution, is required to submit a final report according to section 14 of this regulation.

14. REPORTING

- 14.1. At the end of the first year of the project, the PI submits a brief overview of the project's progress in a free format to the implementer.
- 14.2. The PI in cooperation with the institution shall prepare the final report of the project either in Estonian or in English and the host institution shall submit it to the implementer via ETIS no later than two months after the end date of the project.
- 14.3. The final report shall include the following:
- 14.3.1. project results (including full texts of publications resulting from the project and references to the grant) in accordance with the objectives stated in the application;
 - 14.3.2. a report on the use of the support in accordance with the activity plan submitted in the application
 - 14.3.3. an assessment by the PI of how the support contributed to the resubmission of the ERC grant application;
 - 14.3.4. if the project necessitated compliance with the Nagoya Protocol, the due diligence declaration;
 - 14.3.5. fulfillment of the conditions set forth in point 8.10 upon the allocation of the support;
 - 14.3.6. any other necessary materials for presenting the project, as required by the ETIS final report form.
- 14.4. The implementer may request explanations and additional documents from the applicant and the PI regarding the submitted data if the support report is not sufficiently clear or contains deficiencies. The implementer shall indicate which aspects need further clarification, supplementation, or additional information. If the deficiency is rectified, the support report is considered to have been submitted on time.
- 14.5. When requesting additional information or rectification of deficiencies in the final report, the implementer sets a deadline of up to 10 working days.

15. MAKING THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT PUBLIC

- 15.1. The full texts of publications that have been published as a result of implementing the project will be made freely available to the public via ETIS by the host institution or the PI, unless limited by publishing restrictions, copyright, or intellectual property laws.
- 15.2. Upon the publication of the results of the project, a reference to the European Regional Development Fund and the number of the Mobilitas 3.0 project must be included. Publications that do not contain a reference to the grant will be disregarded in the final report.
- 15.3. If a publishing house restricts access to the articles temporarily, the institution or the PI will make the full texts of the articles published as a result of implementing the project freely available once the restriction has expired.

16. AUDIT AND RECLAMATION OF THE SUPPORT

- 16.1. In the case of non-targeted use of the support, the implementer may demand the return of the support from the applicant. Non-targeted use of the support also includes situations where the PI does not submit an ERC grant application during the application rounds specified in point 5.4 (except if the non-submission of the ERC grant application is due to reasons beyond the control of the PI).
- 16.2. The institution is required to allow the implementer or a person authorised by the implementer to audit the use of the grant and provide necessary assistance, including allowing access to the premises and the territory of the host institution and submitting all the requested documents for the purpose of verifying the correctness of the information provided.